

Diabetes

Diabetes is a lifelong condition that causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high.

There are 2 main types of diabetes:

- type 1 diabetes – where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin.
- type 2 diabetes – where the body doesn't produce enough insulin, or the body's cells don't react to insulin.

Type 2 diabetes is far more common than type 1 - around 90% of all adults with diabetes have type 2. Type 1 diabetes can develop quickly over weeks or even days. Many people have type 2 diabetes for years without realising because the early symptoms tend to be mild and non-specific.

It's very important for diabetes to be diagnosed as early as possible because it will get progressively worse if left untreated. Common symptoms of diabetes include:

- feeling very thirsty
- urinating more frequently than usual, particularly at night
- feeling very tired
- weight loss and loss of muscle bulk
- frequent episodes of thrush
- cuts or wounds that heal slowly
- blurred vision

If you are experiencing these symptoms see your GP as soon as possible.

Diabetic retinopathy

If you have diabetes, your eyes are at risk from diabetic retinopathy, a condition that can lead to blindness if it is not treated.

Everyone who is diabetic should have an eye examination at least once a year to detect diabetic retinopathy early, so it can be treated more effectively.

It usually takes several years for diabetic retinopathy to reach a stage where it could threaten your sight. To minimise the risk of this happening, people with diabetes should:

- ensure they control their blood sugar levels, blood pressure and cholesterol; and
- attend appointments for eye examinations.

Symptoms of diabetic retinopathy

You won't usually notice diabetic retinopathy in the early stages, as it doesn't tend to have any obvious symptoms until it's more advanced. However, early signs of the condition can be picked up during diabetic eye screening.

Contact Derwent Eye Specialists immediately if you experience:

- gradually worsening vision
- sudden vision loss
- shapes floating in your field of vision (floaters)
- blurred or patchy vision
- eye pain or redness

These symptoms don't necessarily mean you have diabetic retinopathy, but it is important to get them checked out. Don't wait until your next appointment.

Treatments for diabetic retinopathy

For diabetic retinopathy that is threatening or affecting your sight, the main treatments are:

- laser treatment
- intravitreal injections
- vitreoretinal surgery

For most people with diabetic retinopathy treatment is successful at preventing the eye sight getting worse, but regular check-ups with your eye specialist will still be needed.